

**By Penny Starr**

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Ahead of his trip to Asia on Thursday, White House officials have said trade, nuclear weapons and global warming will be top priorities when President Barack Obama meets with leaders of Pacific Rim nations, but the non-partisan **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom** is urging Obama to make human rights violations a centerpiece of his visit to China.

In a letter sent to the president on Monday, the commission called religious freedom and the rule of law “crucial issues” in the relationship between the U.S. and China.

“During your visit, we urge you to raise critical issues of religious freedom and the rule of law with Chinese officials, seek meetings with prominent human rights defenders and repressed religious leaders, and make a strong public statement about the importance of human rights to the future of U.S.-China relations,” the commission wrote.